Storytelling as participatory public dialogue: Possibilities for socially inclusive communicative practice

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The Problem

• Public planning is a dialogic process
• Without participation from the whole public, planning outcomes are skewed
• Norms for participation are set by the dominant culture
• Real and authentic dialogue across cultures requires finding ways to meet the participatory needs of the whole public
• One such way is by honouring the communicative practices of the non-dominant cultural group(s)

LaFever, 2005 & 2011

The Case

• In 2010, the government of Canada initiated an inquiry into declines of sockeye salmon stocks in the Fraser River (Terms of Reference, 2010).
• Eight of the 21 groups granted standing represented 28+ First Nation councils, bands and aboriginal organizations (Participants, 2010).
• The dialogic process was set by the government
• The process did not use the communicative practice of the participating indigenous peoples
• One such practice is the use of storytelling (Archibald, 2008)

A Story

Chief Willie Charlie at the Cohen Commission
13 December 2010

The Questions

• Was storytelling used as a dialogic practice in First Nation/Indigenous community submissions to the Cohen Commission of Inquiry?
• If so, to what purpose was storytelling used?

The Methodology

• From archived transcripts, we identified 468 submissions made by indigenous groups
• Loaded all transcripts into NVivo
• Searched transcripts for stories using a framework consisting of the two types of Stó:lō oral history (Stó:lō Heritage, 2003),
  • Sqwelqwel [True Story] (oral narratives relating to personal history)
  • Sxwôxwiyám [Origin Story] (oral histories that describe the distant past)
• Stories were then coded for how they were used in the context of the inquiry
The Findings

Sxwóxwiym

- Give a welcome to the territory
- Provide affiliations within the territory
- Identifying the cultural norms and core values
- Describing laws of resource management

The Findings

Sqwelqwel

- Give contextual information
- Provide territorial descriptions
- Describe values
- Catalogue changes
- Describe fishing/harvesting methods
- Explain traditional ecological knowledge
- Describe uses of salmon
- Indicate importance of salmon
- Provide professional biography
- Describe roles in the community
- Explain communication processes
- Provide definitions

The Findings

Sqwelqwel

- Provide definitions
- Enculturation
- Equal Partners
- Ethics
- Evidence
- Management, co-management, joint-management
- Nation
- Rights vs. Privilege
- Stewardship

The Findings

Sqwelqwel

- Way of knowing and understanding the world
- Connect the past to the present
- When we tell stories we have pictures in our minds
- In oral traditions stories are a way of remembering
- teach us why things are the way they are
- teach us how to live right

The Implications

- Cannot achieve full participation if we do not understand across cultures
- It is the storytellers job to tell the story
- It is up to the listener to find themselves reflected in the story
- Real and authentic dialogue demands that the dominant culture change their way of listening

The Importance of Story in the dialogic process

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References


